REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Exhibiting Diversity

I highly recommend an attentive walk around the exhibit area of the next conference or convention you attend. It is fascinating to survey the variety of goods and services available, and to talk with the many entrepreneurs who make a business of serving the needs of massage professionals. These exhibits also reflect the breadth and diversity of our field and our association.

At a recent state convention I spent some time in the exhibit area talking to three exhibitors who exemplified for me the heritage *and* the future of massage therapy. They made me think about who we are and where we are going, how diverse we are—and how exciting it all is.

One woman I spoke with is a manual lymph drainage therapist and teacher. To me this time-honored skill represents our heritage. It is something to be treasured like your grandmother's recipe for your favorite dish. It was good then, and it is good now because we are human beings and human needs don't change that much. It is the use of massage to help the body recover from illness or stay well by proper circulation of fluids.

Next I spoke to a man who is developing a booming business with seated massage in beauty salons featuring natural products. This is also our heritage with a little twist. Personal care through massage is nothing new, it was just on low profile for a few decades.

Full body massage disappeared from beauty salons in the 1950s during a general period of decline in the field. Now that massage is being rediscovered again, salons are a natural place to have professional massage. People are used to being touched there and the atmosphere is relaxed and friendly. Estheticians already do facials and manicurists do foot and hand massage. In addition to massage on tables, seated massage offers a convenient and safe way for customers to receive full body massage.

Although some don't consider personal care a health service, I disagree. Personal care can be one of the "healthy pleasures" spoken about in a recent popular book of the same name*. Relaxation massage is also a healthy pleasure in a culture where stress is a leading factor in many common diseases. Relieving stress is just as important to good health as proper circulation of fluids.

Next I moved to speak to a man who is developing an educational program for geriatric massage. This is the target population for the future of massage. Today sports massage is popular, tomorrow it will be geriatric massage—working with the elderly. Why? Because there will be so many of us, and massage is so helpful in combating the problems of aging.

* Ornstein, R. & Sobel D., *Healthy Pleasures*, 1989, New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.

Massage directly addresses the physiological, psychological, and emotional effects of aging. I believe that massage, combined with exercise, could be a commonplace health practice in our aging society in the near future. It's not just for those over 65, but also for those who are middle-aged and want to arrive at old age in good shape.

As I reflected on these and other encounters at the exhibits, I recalled some letters I'd received lately complaining that the AMTA was too "medically oriented". That perception didn't match the diversity I saw at the convention.

Today's AMTA has been characterized erroneously by some as a Swedish massage, medically oriented association. A closer look at the association will reveal continuing changes in AMTA programs which reflect changes in the profession as a whole.

When the AMTA was first organized in 1943, Swedish massage was by far the most common entry level training. Earlier AMTA programs reflected this Swedish massage orientation, which persisted until recent years.

That perspective is changing with the times as a more eclectic approach to massage therapy is emerging. Many AMTA programs, including the membership entrance examination, program accreditation and national certification have adopted a more universal approach to the field.

Conversely, the education department is conducting a feasibility study for a Swedish massage specialty program for AMTA members. This acknowledges that Swedish massage is now considered a specialty among many other specific specialties within the larger profession of massage therapy/bodywork.

The myth of AMTA medical orientation was never true. The myth may have been fueled by dictums to wear white as professional dress, but that was just an old custom for many health and fitness related occupations. Uniform white was required for physical education teachers and recreation leaders through the 1960s, and was traditional at the YMCA for health service operators (masseurs). It may have been old fashioned, but wearing white was not a sure sign of medical orientation.

With their initial training in Swedish massage, early AAMM/AMTA members branched out to work in places like health and athletic clubs, vacation spas, beauty parlors, reducing salons, private practices, and in hospitals and medical clinics. Continuing education included study of zone therapy, reflexology, polarity therapy, bloodless surgery, and a variety of other bodywork approaches.

In more recent years, practices such as polarity therapy, oriental bodywork, on-site massage, somatic education, aromatherapy, Na-

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tive American body therapies and other approaches have been written about in the *Massage Therapy Journal.* The latest innovations and practices have also found a receptive audience at AAMM/AMTA conventions.

Early AAMM/AMTA members were a diverse group with a desire to build a professional image for massage therapy which was in general decline in this country at the time. They did this through their professional association, i.e., yesterday's American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses. Today it's your association, the American Massage Therapy Association.

Thriving in an atmosphere of diversity will be one of the themes for the 21st Century. This is true in our neighborhoods, our nation and the world. This is also true for the AMTA. The diversity of our membership is the strength of the AMTA. We should recognize it, value it, preserve it, and cultivate it for a dynamic and exciting future.

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